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AUTHOR Rivera, Charlene
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ABSTRACT

A history and overview is provided of the Assessment of Language Proficiency of Bilingual Persons (ALPBP) Project. First, the points of origin are summarized and the components of the project are noted. Subsequent sections are devoted to a summary of the activities of each component. The research component concerned basic research related to language proficiency assessment (LPA) issues and consisted of three proposals for each of two cycles. The second component dealing with teacher training was implemented over a period of 2 years in Tucson (Arizona) and Berkeley (California). This component intended to provide forums wherein teachers and administrators would explore the application of ethnographic/sociolinguistic theories and methodologies that are used in LPA practices. The final component, an LPA symposium, is described as a major effort toward integrating insights gained from the findings of the other components of the project and as a forum where participants could be encouraged to develop communication networks and to make recommendations on the federal and state levels. The conclusions and recommendations of the components are generalized and the contributions of the ALPBP project are outlined. (AMH)

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Assessment of Language Proficiency of Bilingual Persons (ALPBP) Project

Executive Summary

January 29, 1982

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Submitted by:

InterAmerica Research Associates

Contact person:

Dr. Charlene Rivera
ALPBP Project Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

The ALPBP Research Component 4

The ALPBP Teacher Training Component 8

The Language Proficiency Assessment (LPA) Symposium. 10

Conclusions & Recommendations. 13

INTRODUCTION

The Assessment of Language Proficiency of Bilingual Persons (ALPBP) project resulted from Request for Proposals, NIE-R-79-0012. The project had at least four points of origin. Each is briefly summarized in order to provide perspective on the ALPBP project.

The first point of origin was the 1978 Falmouth Conference on Testing, Teaching and Learning (Tyler & White, 1981), an offshoot of the 1977 Conference called by Secretary Califano, of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, to identify the reasons for the decline in achievement test scores. Participants at the Secretary's conference argued that some of the decline could be attributed to the use of inappropriate tests. The Falmouth Conference participants concluded that testing could be more effective and could serve more important purposes if it was done correctly. They saw the sole use of standardized testing as an unrealistic method of making educational decisions about individuals and about the effectiveness of programs, particularly in light of new information emerging from studies related to human cognition. They urged Federal support of new approaches to testing:

> How are we to pursue this vision of testing merged into a teaching-testing system, fitted to the natural classroom situation, drawing upon the cognitive scientists and teachers and scholars in the subject areas, and exploiting the rapidly developing information-handling technology? One way is to continue and perhaps expand support for research on classroom process and human cognition, and for the development of new technologically-based testing, and testing involving persons from the subject area...development projects are often excellent sites for fundamental research (1981, p. 2)

The history of the ALPBP project is based on Dr. Lois-ellin Data's presentation at the LPA Symposium in Warrenton, Virginia, March 15, 1981.

The second point of origin was a national survey of language minority students involving two studies: the Children's English and Services Study and the Measure of English Language Proficiency Study (CESS-MELP) (O'Malley, 1981), and a project administered by the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (1980) to develop entry/exit criteria for bilingual education programs. Both projects were funded by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA). Useful as the results of these projects are, their development was marked by some concern for the adequacy of the measures. Although the researchers used the best of what was known in order to carry out the survey and develop the criteria, they strongly urged that other studies support research in the area of language proficiency.

The third point of origin was some enthusiasm for what has variously been called interactive research, collaborative development and developmental research. The notion is based on the belief that knowledge and application have too long been too far apart. In order to bridge this gap, it was proposed that researchers and practitioners meet in order to mutually influence the hypotheses and methodology of the research. A few models of such interactive research had been carried out (e.g., Tikunoff et al., 1979; Tikunoff et al., 1980; Shalaway & Lamer, 1979) and the results seemed promising.

Based on these understandings, NIE developed an RFP that required interactive research. The RFP states that,

> Two of the most pressing needs in educating children from minority language backgrounds are (1) to pursue fundamental research on the nature of language proficiency and how it can be measured, and (2) to provide teachers with up-to-date

> knowledge of language proficiency assessment so they can improve their classroom assessment practices. The purpose of this RFP is to solicit proposals for a program of work with two parts: (1) the administration of a competitive research program to support fundamental research on language proficiency assessment and (2) the operation of an experimental program of teacher training designed to introduce teachers to current research perspectives on language proficiency assessment. (1979, p. 5)

Since both components were to be interrelated a third component, a four day symposium, was also implemented as part of the ALPBP project. The symposium provided a forum for practitioners, researchers and policymakers to exchange information regarding language proficiency. The specific purposes of the Language Proficiency Assessment (LPA) Symposium were to:

- keep ALPBP researchers informed about multidisciplinary research findings;
- provide access and availability of information about relevant research findings to both researchers and practitioners;
- relate language proficiency assessment issues to current research in the fields of sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication.

A summary of activities of each component of the ALPBP project follow. Findings for each phase of the project are found in each component report.

The ALPBP Research Component

The specific goals of the research component of the ALPBP project were to fund in two cycles, for one year's duration, basic research related to language proficiency assessment issues. Guidelines for soliciting research proposals, selecting relevant projects and monitoring selected studies are described in detail in: Language Assessment Project, Progress Report to NIE, January 28, 1980. A summary of these activities follows.

A request for proposals was written by the ALPBP Project Director. It summarized the issues which were to be researched. They were:

- Cognitive abilities and proficiency in a first and second language;
- Setting and proficiency in a first and second language;
- Competence in classroom communication; and
- Methods for assessing language proficiency in a first and second language.

Approximately 217 requests for the Proposal Solicitation (ALPBP Research Component - Appendix A) were made during the first funding cycle. Of those, 18% were requests from individuals, 19% were from persons associated with consulting firms, 42% were from persons assicated with a university, and 21% were from persons associated with public service organizations such as school districts and state departments of education. Of those soliciations sent, 14% of the requestors actually submitted proposals. Appendix B to the research report summarizes the categories, methodology, purpose, and budget for each proposal submitted during the first phase of solicitation.

A review panel was selected which was composed of "peer researchers" and "practitioners," who were skilled in language assessment issues within the

classroom setting; had expertise in ethnography of communication, first and second language acquisition, language assessment, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and psychometric research; and had teaching experience in bilingual programs. Those selected represented scholars from multi-ethnic backgrounds with collective expertise in sociolinguistics, first and second language acquisition, linguistics, psychology and psychometrics. Geographically, they represented the Southwest, the West Coast, the Midwest, and Canada.

Proposals received were prepared for an anonymous review and sent to panelists for their evaluation. From the cross-validation of reviewers' ratings, it was possible to rank proposals. The top rated proposals by two or three reviewers, with an average (mean) score of 60 or more, were designated to be further evaluated by all panelists.

Proposals were rated on relevance to the proposal solicitation issues, quality of design, and plan for project management. Based on these criteria, three proposals were selected for the first cycle of funding. They were:

Bilingual Children's Language Proficiency: An Ethnographic Study

Principal Investigators: Dr. Flora V. Rodriguez-Brown and Dr. Lucia Elias-Olivares, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, P.O. Box 4348, Chicago, Illinois 60608;

Linguistic Interdependence Among Japanese and Vietnamese Immigrant Students

Principal Investigators: Dr. Jim Cummins, Dr. Merrill Swain and Daina Green, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6;

Ms. Jean Handscombe and Chau Tran, North York Board of Education, Willowdale, Ontario; and Ms. Kazuko Nakajima, University of Toronto, Ontario;

The Relationship between Native Language Reading Comprehension, Second Language Reading Comprehension, and Second Language Oral Ability

Project Director: Ms. Betsy J. Tregar, Boston Public Schools, Lau Unit, Boston School Committee, 26 Court Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108;

Principal Investigators: Maria Brisk, Roselima Indrisano and Maria Lombardo, Boston University, Boston, MA 02215

The second cycle for soliciting research consisted of the following steps: revision of the original ALPBP project Request for Proposals (RFP)(Research Report - Appendix C), confirmation of the first year review panelists' availability to participate in the proposal review, and adaptation of the first year procedures for receiving and evaluating incoming proposals.

The proposal solicitation was sent out to approximately 297 individuals and/or institutions. Of those approximately 26% were new requestors. Of all the individuals who received proposal solicitations 14% or 41 individuals responded by submitting proposals. The breakdown of second year proposals by area, purpose, methodology, and budget is found in Appendix D to the Research Report.

As with the first year proposals, they were rated on their relevance to the proposal solicitation issues, quality of design, and plan for project management. Based on these critera, three proposals were selected. They were:

Methods of Analyzing Discourse in English and Spanish to Determine Language Proficiency

Principal Investigators: Dr. Helen Slaughter, Tucson Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona and Dr. Adrian Bennett, Centro de Estudios Puertoriquenos, New York, New York;

Study of Graphic Sense and Its Effects on the Acquisition of Literacy

Principal Investigator: Dr. Edwardo Hernandez-Chavez, Instituto de Lengua Y Cultura, Concord, California;

"Limited" Language Proficiency of Mexican-American Third Grade Students: A Problem in the Definition and Measurement of Bilingualism

Principal Investigator: Dr. Zoe Ann Hayes, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada

A description of each study in terms of its purpose, the research questions, methodology and findings are found in the ALPBP Research Component Final Report. Findings are related to the four areas of research outlined in the ALPBP Request for Proposals. Final Reports for each study are found in the ALPBP Research Component - Project Final Reports, Phase I and II.

The ALPBP Teacher Training Component

The teacher training component of the ALPBP project was implemented over a period of two years in two different locations: Tucson, Arizona and Berkeley, California.

In Tucson, Arizona, the teacher training component was implemented in cooperation with Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) and the University of Arizona. Tucson was selected because of the district's interest in providing teachers, resource personnel and administrators with basic training in alternative modes of assessing language proficiency.

TUSD adminstrators felt that the ALPBP teacher training program in ethnographic/sociolinguistic methodologies would complement their efforts in developing a nontraditional language proficiency assessment instrument, the Language Proficiency Measure (LPM) (TUSD, 1981).

The general goal of the training component of the ALPBP project was to provide a forum wherein teachers and administrators would explore the application of ethnographic/sociolinguistic theories and methodologies applied to language proficiency assessment practices. In order to accomplish this goal, bilingual and monolingual educators were provided with a background in linguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnography of speaking, measurement, and research methodology. The expected outcome of the training was that it would enable Tucson educators to develop more effective language proficiency assessment strategies applicable to their particular student population.

The teacher training program at Berkeley, California consisted of a summer course offered through the University of California. It was entitled,

"Speaking of English: Teaching the Language Minority Student." The goals of the course were to introduce participating teachers to theoretical issues involved in educating language minority students.

The process of implementation, outcomes, and evaluation for each of the training programs follow in the reports:

A Course on Bilingual Language Proficiency Assessment

Susan Philips
Department of Anthropology
University of Arizona

Ethnographic/Sociolinguistic Issues and the Assessment of Bilingual Students' Language Proficiency

Charlene Rivera
ALPBP Project Director

Carmen Simich
ALPBP Project Research Associate

InterAmerica Research Associates, Inc.

Language Proficiency and Minority Students

Jim Cummins
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Lily Wong Fillmore
University of California at Berkeley.

The Language Proficiency Assessment (LPA) Symposium

The Language Proficiency Assessment (LPA) Symposium, held March 14 - 18, 1981, at Airlie House in Warrenton, Virginia was planned and implemented as part of the ALPBP project. The LPA Symposium represented a major effort toward integrating both the insights gained from findings emerging from the research component and the implementation of the teacher training programs of the ALPBP project. The Symposium provided a forum where a broad spectrum of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers met to discuss the major issues and research findings which affect language proficiency assessment practices. The Symposium also provided a structure for participants to make practical recommendations directed at influencing federal and state policies regarding language proficiency assessment research and practices. Another objective of the Symposium was to encourage the participants to develop a network of communication for the purposes of exchanging information and incorporating this knowledge into their areas of responsibility.

Researchers were represented by scholars involved in the development of models of communicative competence, related empirical research, and the development and validation of tests of language proficiency and/or communicative competence. Practitioners included teachers and school administrators engaged in the implementation of programs which require the application of language proficiency assessment strategies. Policymakers were individuals who play an important role in the funding of educational research projects related to language proficiency assessment and who are influential in the establishment of policy in this area.

The participants interacted through the presentation of papers, reactions to presentations, and informal discussions. The main goals of the Symposium were selected by the organizers based on a survey of concerns of researchers and educators. The goals were:

- to develop a working definition of communicative competence/ language proficiency;
- to make recommendations for the assessment of language minority students for the purpose of entry/exit into appropriate educational programs; and
- to develop an agenda for future research based on present and past research.

The issues in the area of language proficiency assessment ranged from theoretical questions regarding the nature of communicative competence to the application of research findings. Central to the discussion of language proficiency assessment was the acknowledged need to clarify the nature and scope of communicative competence and its relationship to language proficiency. Topics of discussion in this regard included research findings concerning the nature of children's language use and the role of first and second language in the learning of literacy-related skills.

Language tests and testing methods were also topics addressed by the participants. Questions were raised as to what these tests should be measuring and why. Many of the participants were concerned with the issue of reliability of currently-used language proficiency assessment instruments as well as with the development of new, more appropriate measures. A multi-disciplinary approach to language proficiency assessment and the development of more innovative methods of language testing was supported by participants. An approach of this type would utilize information from such areas as psychology,

anthropology, and linguistics, thus providing the opportunity to gain insights from different perspectives into patterns of language use and related topics. A sociolinguistic/ethnographic perspective to language proficiency assessment, for example, was one of the unique approaches which was examined at the Symposium.

The implications of new research findings on the establishment of government policy, and in particular, of federal guidelines in the area of language proficiency assessment, was a topic which most of the participants believed required serious consideration. Since language proficiency assessment practices are currently undergoing a period of change and reevaluation, it was suggested that the federal government, in revising the LAU guidelines, provide a means of incorporating new research findings regarding the nature of language which have implications for assessing minority students.

The LPA Symposium report consists of three component reports. The first is an analysis of the literature and research in the area of language proficiency assessment and found in the article: Issues in the Assessment of Language Proficiency of Language Minority Students, by Charlene Rivera and Carmen Simich. The second is a summary of symposium presentations. These two reports provide important documentation regarding the state of the art of language proficiency assessment. In addition, they summarize research issues which need to be further documented. The third component of the report is a publication dissemination plan for the symposium proceedings which are to be published through the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations from each component of the ALPBP project are found in the individual component reports. In general, the goals as stated in the original NIE RFP have been met.

Fundamental research on the nature of language proficiency was undertaken and successfully completed. It is recommended, however, based on the experience of funding one year research projects through the ALPBP project, that research should be funded for two years or provisions should be made to review and provide additional funding to those researchers who need the time and money to conclude their investigations.

Two different teacher training model programs were implemented. They provided an opportunity for interactive research and collaborative development. In the case of TUSD, the training program directly contributed to that districts efforts to improve their language proficiency assessment strategies. The Berkeley training program offered an opportunity for educators from diverse school districts to partake in an interactive process where language proficiency assessment was viewed as an integral part of the teaching process.

The LPA Symposium provided a forum for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to more formally interact and discuss the major issues and research findings which affect language proficiency assessment practices. In regard to the major issue of clarifying the concept of communicative competence, the research findings as well as the forthcoming Symposium proceedings consolidate researchers and practitioners outlooks. This contribution to the field is substantial.

The contribution of the ALPBP project to the development of entry-exit procedures is also important. In addition to providing a framework for the development of several new language competency measures, (cf. ALPBP Research Project Report, ALPBP Teaching Training Report), the ALPBP project has highlighted the need for undertaking validation studies of all currently used language proficiency instruments. In addition, it has supported research which approaches language proficiency from both traditional and non-traditional perspectives.

Although these contributions to the field are significant, there is still a need to continue research in this area. Thus, it is strongly recommended that NIE and other funding agencies continue to consider and support research into the nature of minority children's language and its relationship to language proficiency. It is further recommended that interactive research, such as that funded through the ALPBP project, be supported in future funding, since it is an ideal way to integrate theory and practice.

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